



Stanford eCorner

Advent of Podcasting

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1383/Advent-of-Podcasting>

Evan Williams, co-founder of Pyra Labs, creators of Blogger, talks about podcasting and how it started. He believes that due to the "webification" of audio, podcasting has become exciting and popular.



Transcript

Podcasts are essentially audio recordings that are distributed through the Web. And the name comes from the idea that they are put on the Web wrapped in an RSS feed, and then subscribed to, and ultimately they end up on your iPod or such MP3 player-type device. And that started pretty much a year ago. But in that time it's evolving very quickly and there's Apple who's obviously involved now and Yahoo and a bunch of other people. That's the most generic definition, but I think it's going to change pretty quickly. I think it's exciting for a few different reasons. I use the phrase 'the webification of audio'. It's how I like to describe what's happening with podcasting. And audio has been on the Web for lots of years, obviously. I remember in 1996 hearing real audio over the Web and really, every few seconds after it would buffer you'd hear something, and it was a pretty amazing experience.

And then streaming radio has a surprisingly large audience, but it wasn't really a mind-blowing, compelling experience for a long time. And right now, what's happening is sort of several key pieces of infrastructure and expectations, I guess, came into place that made the idea really take off. And those pieces were broadband being extremely widespread, so the idea that you could actually download a hi-fidelity version of audio instead of just streaming it made the experience much better when you're listening, and then, obviously, with the digital devices, notably the iPod that millions of people are carrying around, and the fact they are hooking these to your computers and you could take this audio and then put it on your device and listen to it wherever you want, kind of made the idea obvious to a lot of people. And then suddenly a similar thing happened to...well, it's more or less radio content that happened to print in the early days of the Web. Everyone suddenly saw the Web as this incredibly new distribution vehicle for all this stuff we're publishing. And so that enables a lot of things. It enables an explosion of new content. And that's particularly interesting with audio because when you're talking...we say "audio" generically, but the most interesting stuff in a lot of podcasts is the non-music stuff, because music distribution has evolved quite a bit but the radio type stuff, talk radio or spoken word audio, which can cover a huge variety of topics, has always been pretty limited in its distribution options. So on your talk radio dial, you have very few options for what you can listen to. And so now you have a Web's worth of options of what you can listen to.

And that's pretty interesting. And then the fact that you can listen to it whenever you want it, like the Web, it puts the information consumer completely in control. It's pretty interesting. And then the third premise that obviously was part of the Web as well is that anyone can now be a creator of this content and not just a consumer.